candor and devastating insight, Brenan re-creates his affairs, his strange marriage to an American, Gamel Woolsey, who loved someone else, and his current relationship with a girl 50 years his junior. While Brenan's sales may depend upon his sexual subject matter, the quality of his writing should ensure the book's survival long after television has gone the way of the magic lantern.

JOHN WALKER

Hungary

1974

Soccer players and peasants are the negative heroes of two books that have been politically sensitive best-sellers during the past winter in Hungary. A young Hungarian writer, Antal Végh, author of 11 books and 3 plays, has become a household name only after publication of his latest book, a slim volume of 170 pages, *Why Is Hungarian Soccer Sick?* A first printing of about 25,000 copies, priced at 11 forints (about 50 cents at the tourist rate of exchange), was sold out within a few days last September. By November the pocketbook was going for $25 in the black market.

Hungary, once a world power in soccer, could not even qualify for last year's world championships. Antal Végh did not just deal with soccer as the most popular sport. He painted a somber picture of the all-pervading corruption—personal and institutional bribery with matches freely bought and sold—involving not only players and club officials but also high party and state officials, even army generals. In short, he wrote a thrilling social study in depth about the moral degradation of a supposedly Socialist society.

There is apparently no question of a second printing, though the book would easily have found several hundred thousand buyers. Yet the fact that such a politically explosive shocker could have been published at all indicates the relative leniency of the 17 state-owned and party-controlled publishing houses, a phenomenon unmatched in any other Communist-ruled country except Yugoslavia.

György Moldova's *The Complaint of the Guard* is what may be called a literary nonfiction work about the past misfortunes and present problems of the peasants and others living in 18 villages in Hungary's western border regions. Since time immemorial, these communities have "guarded" the country; hence the title of this controversial book. The 40-year-old writer, in some ways comparable to Truman Capote, evokes the chilling memory of the Fifties, the Stalinist era when so many peasants were deported or harassed as "kulaks," the Russian word for prosperous farmers. Serialized last year in the literary monthly *Kortárs*, Moldova's new book is undoubtedly the second most controversial best-seller of the season.

These two examples, however, may well be deceptive. There has been evidence lately of a more restrictive trend in cultural policy. The police actions against nonconformist writers and critics last autumn indicate an ominous tightening of the screws.

The most prominent victim was György Konrád, whose widely acclaimed first novel, *The Visitor*, was published in 1969 and was translated into several foreign languages. After a long-drawn-out struggle with his publisher and party officials over "recommended" cuts in his new novel, *The City-Founder*, Konrád and two other dissident intellectuals were detained for five days last October and allegedly given the choice of leaving the country or facing charges of "violating the Hungarian penal code"—circulating and smuggling unpublished manuscripts to the West. While Konrád is an outstanding writer, the case of the young radical poet Miklos Haraszti became a *cause célèbre* primarily for political reasons. He was given an eight-month suspended sentence in January 1974 for "incitement against state institutions"—circulating copies of his "New Left"-style book, *The Piece Wage*, which sharply criticizes the alienation and exploitation of the workers in a Budapest tractor plant.

It is something of an irony that Hungarian writers become well known in the West only if they are subjected to persecution. This was the case with Tibor Déry, the doyen of Hungarian letters who spent four years in prison after the 1956 uprising. Yet who knows that last winter, on his eightieth birthday, the same writer received one of the highest state decorations, or that almost 300,000 copies of his novels have been printed during the last two decades?

The problem of *"Enrichissez-vous"* in the wake of economic reforms launched in 1968, the glaring social inequalities in an allegedly proletarian state, and in a broader sense the relationship between power and the people have remained the principal themes of Hungarian literature. While the grand old men of Hungarian letters, Gyula Illyés and Déry, focus on old age and death, a number of highly gifted younger writers, such as Endre Fejes (his *Iron Scrap Cemetery*, about a worker's family since World War I, was published in eight editions between 1964 and 1973!), Ferenc Sánta, Gyula Hernádi, Miklós Mészöly, Ákos Kertész, and Erzsébet Galgoczi, are concerned with "old-fashioned" human values and the changes in life-style and patterns of behavior under the shattering impact of post-World War II revolutionary changes in Hungarian society.

Last but not least, Hungary—with a population of 10.5 million—is the home of poetry. The excellent literary-political weekly *Élet és Irodalom* ("Life and Literature") publishes annual statistics about the number of poems printed in Hungary. During recent years the annual average was 2,600 poems written by some 400 poets. Sixty-four volumes of verse in 250,000 copies were published last year. An unbelievable figure, since, if measured in comparative figures, it

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would mean well over 5 million (generally hardcover) copies of collected poems in the United States!

Unfortunately, Hungarian is a Finno-Ugric language of "luxury"—belonging to a family of languages far removed from the Indo-European tongues of its neighbors—an insurmountable barrier in communication with the outside world. The occasional translations of Hungarian poems are generally well-meaning but pedestrian, if not misleading, attempts at conveying the beauty of the original. Thus, for example, the latest verse of Ferenc Juhász, at 47 the greatest Hungarian poet and certainly one of the greatest in the world, is bound to remain a lost treasure for English-speaking readers. Yet poetry belongs to the essence of Hungarian literary life and traditionally offers the greatest scope for exciting and creative experimentation. Nostalgia for Europe and the world, coupled with the awareness of the linguistic barrier, thus provides the unique background to the Hungarian literary scene.

PAUL LENDVAI

India

The Indian writer has never had it so good. For the first time in the history of India many writers and poets are able to live by writing. Literacy has risen dramatically: When India became independent, in 1947, only 13 out of 100 could sign their names; today almost half the populace can read and write. In a population of 600 million this means more than 250 million potential readers.

State patronage has also played a significant role in bettering the lot of writers. The Sahitya Akademi ("Academy of Letters"), set up in 1954, has been commissioning translations of foreign works, both classic and modern, into Indian languages and from one Indian language to another; awarding prizes of 5,000 rupees ($670) every year for outstanding works of fiction and poetry in each of the country's 15 officially recognized languages; and arranging literary conferences. Each of India's 22 states has a similar academy extending patronage to men of letters in its region, and every large city has a Tagore Theatre, where works of playwrights can be performed. The National Book Trust and state-sponsored language trusts arrange publication of works that commercial publishers are reluctant to handle. All-India Radio, which claims to reach 70 percent of the population, has well-known writers, poets, and playwrights on its payroll. A good radio play has a fair chance of being translated into all Indian languages and earning as many royalty checks. Successful writers acceptable to the Establishment are nominated to the upper house of the Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and to state legislatures, and are named in the annual honors list. By now the number of poets, playwrights, and novelists who have earned state patronage in some form or other runs into the thousands. Of these, the elite are a dozen winners of the Bharatiya Jnanpith Award of 100,000 rupees ($13,335), set up by an industrial house.

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE no reliable figures on publishing and bookselling in India, according to UNESCO only seven countries publish more titles than India does. More than 11,000 firms are listed in the *Directory of Indian Publishers*; among them they publish upward of 14,000 titles every year. English, though frowned upon by the patriotic and read by no more than 2.5 percent of the population, is still well ahead of all the Indian languages: 40 percent of all books published in India are in English; English newspapers and journals command larger circulations and pay more for articles than do journals in vernacular languages.

The national language, Hindi—spoken by over 140 million people—comes a poor second. But Hindi is fast catching up and has already surpassed English in the realm of fiction and poetry. Whereas the most celebrated Indo-Anglian novelist, R. K. Narayan, rarely sells more than 10,000 copies of a new novel, the works of the most widely read Hindi writer, Gulshan Nanda, go into many editions of 50,000 each. His *Jheel Key Us Par* ("On the Other Side of the Lake") has broken all Indian records, having sold more than 1.5 million copies in three years. Nanda, like many other Hindi writers, is also much in demand by the film industry. When their novels are bought, these writers are also commissioned to write the film scripts and the dialogue, and they earn enormous fees. Hitherto only one novel in English, R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, has been filmed.

Poets writing in Indian languages do even better. Most of them begin their careers by appearing at poetry symposia *(Kavi Sammelans)*, which draw enormous crowds. Thereafter their poems appear in journals and newspapers (most papers devote a column or two to poetry every day), and, finally, they bring out anthologies of their works.

If poets manage to gain entry to the film business, their future is assured. They compose lyrics to suit the scenes, and some of the top Urdu poets—the language in which most film songs are written—command fees between 30,000 and 100,000 rupees ($4,000 to $13,335) for composing half a dozen lyrics. All transactions in the film industry are in cash and are rarely reported to income-tax authorities.

The Indians' reading tastes are very different from those of Europeans or Americans. Religion, science, philosophy, economics, and politics are more avidly read than fiction or poetry. Translations of the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* are steady sellers. Books on Hinduism, notably the works of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, ex-President of the republic, and the *pensées* of Krishnamurti, are found on the shelves of every public library. Of contemporaries, the most highly rated is Nirad C. Chaudhuri *(Autobiography of an Unknown Indian, The Continent of Circe)*. Some of the esteem he enjoys is due to his harsh criticism of Indian character. For the same reason, V. S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* continues to be a steady seller.

Books published in the United States or in England command more respect and circulation than those published in India. Even established Indian writers like R. K. Narayan, Dom Moraes, R. Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, and M. D. Malgonkar are not so widely read as British or American writers like Lawrence Durrell, J. D. Salinger, Norman Mailer, Mary McCarthy, Saul Bellow, Kingsley Amis, and Iris Murdoch. In 1974 Prime Minister Indira Gandhi read 19 books, all of which were in English. Of these only two were by Indian authors and only one was published in India.

KHUSHWANT SINGH

Italy

Every week the Italian magazine *Panorama* publishes a list of best-sellers, based on reports from a dozen bookshops scattered along the peninsula. Thanks to insistent new marketing methods, many Italians buy their books in railroad stations, at street stalls, or from door-to-door salesmen; so *Panorama*'s classification may not be 100 percent re-

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Saturday Review

LENDVAI PÁL

1975

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